

“Bat-astrophe” – Front Page News in Hampshire

“Council face legal action after destroying bat roost”

Tree work destroys a bat roost – on the day that a nation-wide police protection campaign, ‘Operation Bat’, was launched.

A “council¹ is now facing legal action after taking a chainsaw to the roost on Wednesday, June 30th.” Clare Coleman, Exclusive for the Basingstoke Observer, front page news, on July 8th 2004.

It appears that the bats were discovered in a hollow branch of an old lime tree. Tree felling and pruning works were being undertaken on a group of trees in the centre of the village. The work had been organised by the council as a result of a tree hazard assessment, health and safety inspection.

The branch containing the roost site had been removed in its entirety by the contractors, but it was not until they cut it up on the ground that the roost site was found. The arborist cut through the cavity using a chainsaw to discover that, inside was a maternity roost of bats, thought to be either Daubenton’s or Natterer’s bats. The contractor working on site reported the incident and the council contacted an independent environmental consultant, Lee Morgan, of LM Environmental Consulting.

Lee Morgan reported that at least one bat was actually killed by the chainsaw, some few away, while several more were rescued and put back in the branch cavity. The log was then strapped back together and, using a cherry picker, the section was carefully lifted back into the tree and secured to a large limb. Luckily, the fleeing adult bats were observed returned to their babies later that evening. However, Lee believes the ‘bat-astrophe’ could have been easily prevented. He said: “The council had a survey done by the Tree Advice Service, who picked out two trees as having advanced root rot, and recommended the work should be prioritised. However, the report also stated that it should be planned to avoid times when birds are nesting and that a bat survey was needed on significant tree hollows. It wasn’t done!”

¹ The council is not named for legal reasons and although reported in the Basingstoke Observer the incident had nothing to do with the borough council.



PC Geoff Culbertson, a Wildlife Crime officer, said Hampshire Constabulary were looking into the incident and considering the possibility that offences had been committed.

Operation Bat, launched by the police on 30th June 2004, aims to provide a standard operating procedure for the police to deal with bat-related offences and assist in preventing bat crime. Bats and their roost sites are fully protected by law, because recorded populations suffered such a significant decline in the 20th century. Leading the campaign to help bats the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) welcomes this ground-breaking initiative

This project comes at a time when bats have been recognised as a Wildlife Crime Conservation priority and is a direct result of the empirical evidence provided by last year’s ‘Bat Crime’ report, published by the BCT and RSPB. The report recorded that 144 bat offences had been committed in the UK over two years, a number far higher than anticipated but now suspected to be only the tip of the iceberg.

More information on bats and bat crime can be downloaded from the Bat Conservation Trust web site www.bats.org.uk or call 020-7501-3622 or log onto www.arborecology.co.uk for comprehensive advice on bats and trees.